

From the Vilnius region to Warmia and Mazury. Sociological analysis of the memory and identity of Polish displaced people after World War II

The doctoral dissertation deals with the transformation of the socio-cultural identity that occurs between the three generations considered in terms of: the "memory - identity" relation (covering the content of memory, a component of identity, relation to it and its meaning to identity), sense of belonging and territorial identity, the category of the homeland - its location and relation to it, the image and imaginations about its own group and other groups, factors determining the variability and continuity of group relationships that are a component of a sense of belonging and group identification.

The fates of displaced persons, which were made the subject of the presented dissertation, are described and analyzed in the theoretical perspective concerning the relation: memory - identity. After the Second World War, mass and forced repatriation of people living in pre-war Poland took place; from the Northeastern Borderlands to the Western and Northern Lands. In total, the entire resettlement operation covered in the years 1945-1950 up to one and a half million people. Warmia and Mazury, which was made an area of research, was one of the places where displaced persons settled. Until 1950 there were 134,2 thousand displaced persons from the East, including from the Vilnius region.

These historical events were experienced at the level of individual biographies as leaving family sites. It was only after 1989, after the liquidation of the political iron curtain, that the borderlands could move freely around the pre-war Polish Northeastern Borderlands, visit the places where they were born and lived before the war. This change has transformed the subjective biographical perspective of those affected by displacement, many people only then began to speak freely about their wartime experiences and roots. Although this subject was dealt with in the social sciences by many authors and researchers, it seems that there are still many questions and doubts about these events and it is far from being exhausted. It also arouses emotions among ordinary people, especially on the eastern edges of our country. That is why the author decided to carry out research in north-eastern Poland, in the area she inhabits. For centuries it has been a borderland of cultures and even civilizations, which determined the necessity of constructing groups of expressive identity, legitimizing their presence

and defending their interests. Also today, several dozen years after the war and mass displacement, the issues of memory and identity are still important for their residents.

The author has conducted sociological research in three generational groups: 1) with people who as adults or teenagers left Vilnius after World War II, 2) with children of displaced people who know those areas from family remittances and 3) with grandchildren of displaced people. In total, the research covered thirty-six people and was conducted in 2011-2017. The research method was a biographical method, and the technique was a narrative interview.

The aim of the work was to answer the question: what is the socio-cultural identity, at the current stage of its shaping process, in three different generations: the oldest residents - displaced persons from the Vilnius region, their children and the youngest (adults) - born and raised in Warmia and Mazury. The research problem of the work boiled down to answering the question whether the migration experienced by the oldest generation from the point of view of the identity problem violated the principle of the continuity of the socio-cultural identity.

The dissertation consists of an introduction and two parts. The first, theoretical part, was divided into three chapters, in which a critical review of the literature on the subject of memory and time, identity and historical description of the phenomenon of resettlements from the Northeastern Borderlands to Warmia and Mazury was made. The second, empirical part, consists of two chapters. The first is devoted to discussing the methodology of own research; the second is the description and analysis of the results of the research carried out (biographical interviews). The analysis focused on the issues of resettlement and the first period of adaptation of displaced persons, the socio-cultural identity of respondents and the identity symbols of displaced persons and their families. The work ends with a summary, a bibliography and an annex.

The conducted analysis of narrative interviews gave the answer to the research problems posed. The similarity of the main principles that organize memory and identity is noted.

The oldest generation defines itself as a "community of rejection" whose identity was threatened by dominant and hostile entities, including Russians, Ukrainians and Lithuanians, who used coercive measures, wanting to get rid of them from the territories of pre-war Poland. In view of such external threats, they strengthened their symbolic boundaries, emphasizing the importance of internal integration and solidarity, and

cultivated a sense of their own distinctiveness. This internal integration and solidarity was not noticed among the other generations studied.

The experience of migration has violated the principle of the continuity of identity, and the lack of return and compulsion has interrupted its linear structure. In new, post-war conditions, the need to look for new identification points has arisen. Pre-war regional separateness, defining the limits of familiarity and community, over time in new, post-war, everyday contacts was blurred. However, these borders have not simply disappeared from the consciousness and memory of these people. As a subjective, fixed image of the former divisions, they still facilitate moving around in the social space. The sphere of close relationships, a sense of "we" still - in this generation - does not go beyond the old local community, own family and friends, and if it involves neighbors, it is mainly those with whom they came here. In the oldest generation, it is difficult to talk about the creation of a strong territorial connectivity allowing to determine this place as a private homeland (as understood by S. Ossowski). This conclusion is in line with the sociological understanding of the concept of private homeland, that is, embedding it in the memories of childhood and emotional memories that are retained in memory, related to the mental return to the place where man grew up, where the most precious and the most valuable have been left. And over time, it is subject to idealization and sentimentalization. In the majority of narratives, this generation appeared in terms of "being a Pole," Polishness as such, while locating a lost private homeland in the pre-war eastern Poland.

The middle generation is characterized by a very rich memory concerning the motherland of parents, resettlement action, emotions that accompanied and still accompany their parents. It is indicated here the occurrence of the rooting of memory and intergenerational transmission of trauma, post-memory, which were often the result of the parents' story (it should be borne in mind that some people belonging to the middle generation were born in the territories of Warmia and Mazury). Both in the children of displaced persons and their parents, there was a common sense of temporariness, a motive for the conviction that they would be able to return home soon after resettlement. There was a post-memory of the roots house abandoned by the parents. On the one hand, we deal with the interference of family history and regional memory, ethnic past in the place from which the borderlands were displaced, and their mental or real return to the land of fathers (permanent and occasional ones, the so-called "tourism longing") make it possible to supplement knowledge about the family past,

give it a group, broader framework, historical and cultural context. Often, they ended with the closing of the biographical thread by the final statement of expiration of its physical correlate - a family home, a local fatherland. In the group of people from the second generation, the image of the first generation's longing for family parties was mediated. On the other hand, there were lapses of memory, which may have been connected with the desire to forget the trauma they experienced as children. Most often this generation indicates the existence of two houses, two private homelands - one in the Vilnius region, the other in Warmia and Mazury ("small" homeland). Everyone feels Polish, but most of them feel also "borderlands".

The youngest generation represented mainly the type of prospective identity, which, however, contained some elements of the interrupted identity. Although in this generation there is a phenomenon of intergenerational transmission (cultivating the traditions of their ancestors), it is difficult to talk about the continuation or attempts to recreate the identity of the oldest generation, because they were rarely undertaken. The youngest generation built their identity by directing it to the future and - differently evaluated – to the present.

The analysis of biographical interviews showed the immense significance of the family context of the transmission of memory.

In the case of displaced persons and their children, two topics were important in this memory: the first was related to the harm suffered during resettlement, and the second concerned difficulties in adapting to the new environment.

From the sociologist's point of view, these experiences, although analyzed by me on the example of empirical material concerning specific, historical events of a local nature, have universal value. "Sociology of resettlement" and forced migration allows to describe phenomena happening in a specific place and a specific historical time, but also to seek theoretical generalizations, allowing to see them as subject to laws and regularities having a supra-local character. To this, as the search for a socio-historical framework of memory and identity, the dissertation is used.